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# *Management Training*

for Supervisors and Staff Officers

## Unit 6 Self-Improvement

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You cannot teach a man anything;

You can only help him to find it within himself.

Galileo



## SELF-IMPROVEMENT

## OBJECTIVES

To show the supervisor how:

- (1) To stimulate the right attitude toward self-improvement among those he supervises.
- (2) To encourage the development of necessary attributes, qualities, and traits.
- (3) To most efficiently use time devoted to self-improvement; how to plan.
- (4) To help employees acquire and use the most helpful reference and study materials.

## TO THE SUPERVISOR:

This entire supervisory management course is designed to stimulate you to do something for yourself and to show you how to get others to improve themselves. The essential thing is what you do yourself, not what someone else does for you, to you, or about you. You, yourself, are going to make yourself a better supervisor. In setting an example, you must learn to speak well and write effectively. You have to pick up the pencil yourself; you have to write with it; you must form words. These words must express thoughts. The thoughts must fit together to make ideas. They are your words, your thoughts, and your ideas. What ideas you have and the way you express them will be determined by the quality of your thinking. How do you improve the quality of your thinking? How do you get ideas? How do you put them into the right words? How do you use words and ideas to get desired action? The answers to these questions are the answers to self-improvement. The following material is to help you to improve yourself as a supervisor and to give help to those you supervise.

The fascinating challenge of self-improvement is that in its practice you delve into practically unlimited possibilities. It is very doubtful if anyone in the Soil Conservation Service has come even close to developing his

full potentialities. This reflects no discredit on anyone, nor should it discourage anyone. Rather it should be a stimulating thought. He who may be the poorest has the potential to make himself the best. This, one must believe if he wants to improve himself. The most talented thinkers and writers agree on this. This is faith in one's self. The greater the degree of faith, the greater the success. Faith is measured by work. Self-improvement means work.

#### PRINCIPLES FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

The development process is a highly individual matter.

No person is just like any other person. The individual is unique, and he changes with time. No man today is the same man he was yesterday. It follows that we cannot successfully develop people by means of canned, cut and dried, over-standardized methods. Human development can never be an assembly line or stamping-machine process. There is no average man to whom you can apply uniformly the same method. What is good for one may not be good for another.

Every man's development is self-development.

The Soil Conservation Service has an interest in his development, and it can and will help; but it has no obligation to "develop" the man. The motivation, the desire, the effort, the obligation and the responsibility lie with the man himself. Development is not something you do "to" a man; it is something he does himself with encouragement and assistance from the Service.

The development of people cannot be based on any set of ideals or specified personality traits.

There just isn't any standard pattern of personality traits that makes a good employee. We have to take men as they are with the traits they have and try to bring about their development from that basis. In development and educational activities, research has taught us to concentrate on the work rather than upon personality traits. You cannot get at personality traits, either to define them or to change them, whereas you can get at the work a man does. So there is where attention should be centered.

A man's development is 90% the result of his experience in day-to-day work.

Research on this subject has shown that successful managers in industry consider their greatest development occurred while working on jobs. Only about 10% weight was given to civic



activities, outside courses, rotation or other special development training. All of these things are important, but the direct daily experience is so much more important that there is not much doubt about where the major attention should be directed. Every SCS man is having experience in his day-to-day work that tends to develop him or to retard his development. He is daily reacting to the climate in which he works and to his relationship with his immediate supervisor. And these appear to be the most important factors in the development process.

Opportunity for development must be universal.

Everybody in SCS must be given opportunity to develop. Not just a small group, not even a large group, but everybody. There can be no dividing line between promising men who will be developed and "unpromising men" who will be ignored. There can be no "separation of the sheep from the goats." Opportunity must be available for everyone who is motivated to accept it and go to work on it. The lesser man is not cut off from opportunity. He is offered appropriate opportunity in the beginning and subsequent opportunities as earned. The brighter man will earn them faster and easier than the dull man, but this is a matter of degree, not of black and white. Nobody gets left out. And room is provided for happy surprises, "dark horses", poor starters, and strong finishers.

Primary emphasis must be on development in the present assignment rather than emphasis on a promotional ladder.

Promotion is important as a developmental factor. But if undue stress is laid on the promotional ladder, everyone begins to feel that he is in his present job only temporarily; that he is on the way up the ladder; that he must devote most of his attention to looking ahead to the next rung and not to getting his present work done. Furthermore when the main emphasis is on promotion, the inevitable outcome is a lot of expectations that cannot be fulfilled and a lot of promises that cannot be kept. Research to date points to saying something like this: "Boys, keep concentrating on doing today's job particularly well. This is the base from which all advancement is made." While thus concentrating on his present job, the employee should be encouraged and helped in every way to broaden himself and make himself capable of taking on a bigger job.

Broadening for the future should be an additional factor; the main objective is doing better what you are doing now.

Managing is a separate and distinct kind of work which is emerging as another profession.

This fact must be recognized in planning a man's development. It does not necessarily follow that a good engineer will make a good area or state conservationist. We must, therefore, get the best possible answer to the question: Does this man have the capabilities and drives to enter the profession of managing or should he continue to progress in his present field? In planning a man's development, the first question should be, "Is he in the right kind of work?" Is he headed in the right direction for him? It is a difficult decision to make; but if employee and supervisor look at it from this point of view, the chances of making good choices are considerably improved.

Decentralization of decision-making is a prime instrument of development.

Decision-making muscle is developed only by making decisions. No one can really develop judgment and learn how to make good decisions except by actually making decisions. In the Soil Conservation Service, supervisors have many opportunities for delegating decision-making opportunities, thus, assisting individuals with their development in this field.

Line officers at all levels are responsible for the development of people who work under them.

Line officers cannot delegate this responsibility to others. They can delegate the leg work and some of the educational activities but primarily they must carry the responsibility. Part of the rule against which they are measured is the serious and intensive work they do in helping those who report to them develop themselves. Supervisors must watch the climate that exists; they must make development plans for and with their men; they must originate opportunities and work situations which will develop them.

Moral and spiritual values are basic in the development process.

Throughout history, the human being has advanced very little, if at all, while the scientific and physical things he has in his hands have grown out of all proportion. It seems absolutely necessary that we reach out and try to find some wisdom greater than our own, greater than the merely human. We have to reach out and up for the great help we need in making decisions with regard to these physical things and the people involved in them.

## THE KEY TO SELF-IMPROVEMENT IS "YOU"

Your attitude toward  
self-improvement  
is important!

Self-improvement means working on, for, and with the most interesting and yet the most difficult person in the world - yourself. Your attitude toward others and toward your work is determined by your attitude toward yourself. At the very outset of self-improvement work, you must come to terms with yourself; you must establish an attitude. Your present attitude toward self-improvement might be indicated by your reaction to this training course. You may think of it as "one of those things," or "pretty good - maybe I'd better look into it sometime," or "this is what I've been looking for; how will it help me." He who has the latter attitude is already on the road to self-improvement because he has enthusiasm. If your reaction is something less than enthusiastic, do not be discouraged. It may be simply that you haven't really tried. Effort alone will bring success and success will generate enthusiasm.

You must WANT to  
IMPROVE!

Perhaps an overlooked factor in self-improvement is how to stimulate a desire to improve. Action is usually commensurate with intensity of desire. We say, "If he wants it badly enough, he will get it." Whatever the degree of his desire for improvement, each person must at least try. The trying, itself, is part of self-improvement. It may be the most important part. Trying and succeeding will increase desire. Unless you try you will never know what you can do. The greatest mistake you can make, the most inexcusable, is not to try. Even if you do not succeed in your efforts, there can be no failure if you have done your best. The timid and hesitating find everything impossible simply because it seems so; they don't try.

So ask yourself the question: "Do I really want to improve myself?" If you do, there must be a recognition of the difficulties and an earnest desire to overcome them.

Develop and maintain  
the right attitude.

Keep before you constantly the rewards of self-improvement. In addition to promotion and increased salary, some of these are: to be well thought of; to associate yourself with learning, progress, culture - a better social



position; to identify yourself with distinguished and successful people; to make an important contribution to the arts, sciences, or a great cause; to enlarge your intellectual horizons; to travel; to teach others; to experience the thrill of creativeness; to equal or excel some person you admire; and to become what you consider to be "successful."

Establish an ideal, then strive to reach it.

Do something every day.

Make your endeavor continuous. Do not let a single day go by without doing something over and above your routine tasks that adds to your stock of knowledge and skills.

Do the "tough" jobs first.

Discipline yourself. One writer has stated, "When you rise in the morning, be thankful if you have at least one task that you don't want to do. Do it!" Strength comes by making yourself do what you don't want to do.

Follow good examples.

Observe the actions, habits, and speech of successful men. Much of this can be done by reading, especially biographies and autobiographies. Lay hold of whatever good that attracts you.

Start something "on your own".

Of all these rewards, perhaps the most important in promoting self-improvement is to experience the thrill of creativeness. Ralph Waldo Emerson stated that the greatest service one can render another person is to help that person discover and use his own talents; in other words, self-reliance.

If you don't yet know what you want, start a study course on what you think you want. You cannot have deep-felt interests, you cannot have ideals, unless you get started on something. You will never know what's in the storehouse of knowledge and wisdom for you unless you open the door and start exploring.

Analyze yourself.

"Know thyself" is the foundation on which self-improvement is built. The best way to analyze yourself is to make a list of your weak and strong points. In doing this, it is wise to check the list with your supervisors or others who know you well. Your best friend may never mention your weak points, even if you ask him. A good supervisor, however, will be frank with you because it is to his credit, as well as yours, to recognize weaknesses and help you correct them.

Analyses by supervisors are provided in the appraisal system under the career service policy of SCS. Three people in supervisory positions separately appraise each employee on at least twelve factors, and a summary statement is made. In addition, standards of performance are established as an every-day working tool for mutual understanding between employees and supervisor, and a performance rating is given at the end of the year. It is in these appraisals and performance ratings that the results of self-improvement will become evident. These are used in making up promotional registers.

Once you definitely recognize your weak points, make a plan and schedule for improvement.

The following "Self Analysis Evaluation" form will help you in analyzing yourself. This material is taken from "Guide Posts for Supervisors" - Office of Personnel, USDA, Washington, D. C.

## SELF-ANALYSIS EVALUATION

## Reliability

I do my work without need of follow-up by others.  
I do my work on time.  
I work a full day each day.  
I do my work accurately and well.

## Flexibility

I can adjust to new policies, conditions, and procedures.  
I don't grumble about changes.  
I like new ideas.

## Emotional Stability

I exercise self-control.  
I keep cool under pressure.  
I am never moody.  
I consider all sides before reaching decisions.

## Resourcefulness

I have suggested improvements. (List them)  
I have overcome some obstacles. (List them)  
Problems challenge rather than bother me.

Sincerity

I waste time.  
I visit with friends too long.  
I soldier on the job.  
I watch the clock.

## Cooperation

I carry a chip on my shoulder.  
I lean toward "do it my way or else" attitude.  
I find I have a "closed mind" on some things.  
I have trouble working with some people.

[illegible]

Break the mental block.

Getting started is of such importance that everything else in the field of self-improvement is secondary to it. You and only you must start, and you and only you must carry on. All this unit can do or anything that anyone tells you, or anything you read or observe can do, is to appeal to your own curiosity, interest, ambition, enthusiasm, or ideals. You must open the door yourself; you must take the first step and keep stepping forward. All that experience and wisdom can assure you is that the rewards are certain and are commensurate with the effort.

The greatest block to self-improvement is indolence. If you are to improve yourself, you must stir yourself to action. An hour wasted daily on trifles will, if devoted to self-improvement, make an ignorant man wise in a few years. Quoting from a famous writer on the use of time: "Fifteen minutes a day devoted to self-improvement will be felt at the end of the year. Good thoughts and carefully gathered experience take up no room, and are carried about with us as companions everywhere without cost or incumbrance. An economic use of time is the sure mode of securing leisure; it enables us to get through business and carry it forward instead of being driven by it. On the other hand, the mis-calculation of time involves us in perpetual hurry, confusion, and difficulties; and life becomes a mere shuffle of experiences, usually followed by disaster. Lord Nelson once said, 'I owe my success in life to having been always one-quarter of an hour before my time.'"

Make self-improvement a daily habit.

So, if this unit on self-improvement does one thing more important than all the rest together, that one thing would be to get each employee of the Soil Conservation Service to spend some time each day on self-improvement. If it is only 15 minutes, but done regularly, habitually, and earnestly every day with an objective in mind, the employee will find that self-improvement is the most interesting, fascinating, and rewarding project he could possibly undertake.

One top supervisor in the SCS is a writer. He has authored and co-authored a number of books. I asked him how he could do it and still hold down a supervisory job that required all of his working hours. He told me that he had developed

a habit. He would not allow himself to end a single day without writing something on a manuscript that was intended ultimately to be a published article or book. If he had a busy day followed by a party in the evening and didn't get home until the small hours, still he added something, if only a line, to his writings. That one line didn't mean much in itself - the habit was the thing!

This is very important. A trend of thought is like a smoldering fire. If not fanned, it smolders to extinction. If constantly fed, it flames into ideas and actions.

### STEPS IN SELF-DEVELOPMENT

#### What are your objectives?

1. The first phase of "developing yourself" is to examine your objectives, what you think you want out of life. There is an abundance of evidence to support the viewpoint that clear-cut objectives are essential to success in any field of endeavor and that clear-cut objectives are also essential for worth while living and the attainment of genuine satisfaction out of life.

A study of the basic reasons for success and failure indicates that at least 95% of those persons who have made any conspicuous achievement in life have had definite objectives; they knew what they wanted and they followed well formulated plans to achieve their goals.

#### Visualize what you want most.

Try this experiment: Visualize some of the major objectives you would like to attain within one year from today, two years, five or ten years hence. Make a rough outline of what you visualize; put it away; and examine it critically at a later date.

#### Make a plan.

2. The second phase in self-development is planning to get what you want. Planning should be based on self-analysis which has been discussed and on your objectives. Once we have determined what we want out of life and appraised our present situation accurately, we are ready to develop a plan of action that will take us from where we are now to where we want to go.

The person who does not try to look into the future, who does not endeavor to



visualize what he wants out of life is probably restricting his potential progress.

We do in life what we first do in our imagination, and we tend to get out of life what we send our imagination after.

### What is planning?

Planning spans the chasm between where we are now and where we want to be. Through imagination we conceive, construct, and visualize the things we desire; we construct mental images of what we want to know and do and be!

Planning is foreseeing anticipated achievement, foreseeing problems and finding solutions. Planning is the fact-inspired thinking, dreaming, and designing necessary to determine our objectives and to lay out the road maps we expect to follow. Planning projects our thinking toward what we propose to do, when we expect to do it, and how it is to be done.

Your plan may consist of a course of informal reading and study, correspondence courses, night school work, in-Service training, special assignments or details, educational leave to get special courses or advanced degrees, or a combination of these, as worked out with your supervisor.

These items should be listed, together with the books to be read, persons to consult or to give training, and so forth, with dates or time periods within which the improvement is expected to be accomplished. Definite plans help to establish good working habits.

### Motivate yourself and those you supervise.

3. The next step is to create circumstances and to develop situations which will stimulate us to carry out the plan. The greatest of all arts is the creation of circumstances which cause people to produce at the optimum of their capacity, not because they have to, but because they really want to.

Review your purposes in life. Why do you want to achieve certain objectives? So what! Challenge your basic philosophy, values, and ideals of life so that you can be certain as possible that your objectives are worth while. Ask yourself again: What

have I hammered out on the anvil of experience and clarified to myself as the most worth while concepts of life? How can I apply scientific methods and modern management know-how to the solution of my personal development problems? The answers to such questions help us to clarify our convictions and lead us toward the sources of our basic motivations.

"No one" said John Chadwick, "can cherish an ideal, devote himself to it's realization from year to year and strive and struggle and make sacrifices for it's attainment without undergoing a certain transformation of which the highest powers must be aware and which men can hardly miss." Wanting develops the "motive power" that propels our thinking and actions. This is the challenge to set up real objectives - to free ourselves from the prison of limited thinking.

#### Follow-through

4. The final phase of "developing yourself" is effective follow-through, establishing control points for checking achievement against desired objectives. This involves a periodic appraisal of our performance, asking ourselves, are we up to schedule? Do we need to redesign our programs in order to keep face with external progress? Is there a better way to achieve what we want? Do we need outside help; new or different kinds of knowledge and skill in order to achieve goals? What remedial actions do we need to take now and in the future in order to improve or speed up my progress?

The price of achievement is everlasting follow-through. This requires faith and self-discipline. Self-discipline governs our thoughts, emotions, and actions; compels desired performance. There is no progress or improvement without action. Action requires self-discipline.

Faith is the heart of achievement. Faith is the essence of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. If faith is not strong then everything else is weak.

Faith guides us to our greater destiny.  
Remember, visions (faith) tend to become  
reality.

#### OTHER GUIDES FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

##### Use your talents.

An important factor in self-improvement is to take full advantage of one's strong points. A technician who is an authority in his technical field should exert leadership in that field. He should take the initiative in developing technical handbooks and criteria and in presenting technical material at staff conferences and training sessions. Similarly, an employee who speaks and writes effectively should seek and take advantage of opportunities for good public relations work. Self-improvement calls for expression: "Only by their works shall ye know them."

##### The supervisor should help.

The supervisor should assist the employee in his self-analysis and help him with his self-improvement plan; he should give him committee leadership, special details, assignments to other areas and to duties and responsibilities that will enable him to demonstrate his improved abilities.

##### Avoid distractions.

There is no lack of self-improvement aids. Those who complain most about absence of information, guides, texts, and direct personal assistance are usually the ones who are making the least, or no, use of helps already available. A fellow SCS'er advised, tersely, "Self-improvement also involves things not to do. Tell them to find the button that turns off the TV set."

##### Read and study.

Go into almost any library and look in the card index of books under "Self." You will find a large number of books on "Self-advancement," "Self-culture," "Self-help," "Self-improvement," etc.

##### Select books that you need.

What may be a good reference book for one person may not fit another. Select those that fit your needs, interests, and objectives. This is training in itself. It is a way of discovering where your interests and talents lie and how you may best apply yourself. It may lead you into new phases of learning associated with soil and water conservation.

Advancement in the SCS does not depend on technical and professional proficiency only. Effective speaking and writing, relations, development of character and personality, involve a wide field of learning and are all important attributes to self-improvement.

A great deal of material is available in all our offices for use of the employee who is willing to learn. The personal libraries of fellow employees is another source of material. Remember what Lincoln did to borrow a book. Fellow employees are usually glad to loan books and may borrow, in exchange. Our Department libraries are, of course, available to all. Do you know the address of your branch of our library? Do you patronize it?

Learn to speak and  
write effectively.

"In the beginning was the Word." Words are the beginning of any accomplishment. They are the tools of thought, and thought is the basis of action. Learn to use words. The learning method -- read, study, practice. Build your vocabulary. Put your reading and study into practice. Learn to write by writing. Learn to speak by taking advantage of opportunities to talk to individuals and to groups. Organize and/or join a Toastmasters' Club.

"Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye speak into the air."

Get help from your  
fellow employees.

One important source of learning, too infrequently used, is the simple, straight-forward question to an older, more experienced employee: "How do you solve this type of problem?" Any cooperative supervisor will welcome such a question and will even assign homework to supplement his answer. For the inquiring mind and the ambitious employee, many avenues of self-improvement are open. Nearly everyone wants to help the employee who is ambitious and who helps himself. The essential ingredient is self-motivation.



Resources to consider  
in carrying out the  
self-improvement  
plan

Opportunities for self-development in management training are many and varied. The following are some resources that are available:

1. Formal education

A. College and Universities

Fellowships and scholarships are available at several colleges and universities. Individuals interested should contact the institution of their choice or the SCS Personnel Management Division to determine current programs.

The 1958 training act authorizes payment by the government for formal training when it is needed in connection with the individual's job and cannot be obtained within the Service or through other governmental agencies. Practical use will be made of this new authority within established SCS policy. For further information, consult your supervisor and review SCS training memorandums which establish our policy on outside training.

B. Civil Service Intern Programs

C. Short Courses Such As Those At:

- (1) University of Michigan
- (2) University of Montana
- (3) American Management Association

D. Correspondence Courses

- (1) USDA Graduate School
- (2) International Correspondence School
- (3) Land-Grant Colleges
- (4) LaSalle Extension University
- (5) Others (see reference to National Home Study Course)

E. In-Service Training Courses

F. 1958 Training Act

2. Informal Education

A. Good reading lists compiled by each employee to fit his own needs.

- (1) American Management Association
- (2) USDA "Guide Posts to Supervisors"

SCS policy encourages  
educational leave  
for career advancement.

## B. Sources of Reading Material

- (1) USDA Library
- (2) University Libraries
- (3) Town and State Libraries
- (4) American Management Association

### READING REFERENCE LIST

USDA Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 63, Soil Conservation Service, entitled "Books, Booklets, Bulletins, On Soil and Water Conservation," is available at most State Offices. It lists some 70 books, as well as a large number of articles. Many of these are reading "musts" for those interested in self-improvement. Many of these books contain bibliographies and references. The employee who is eager to learn can soon avail himself of a wide variety of informational material.

"Three Steps to More Skillful Management," Vol. 3 - Managing Yourself, compiled by Editors of Nation's Business, 1615 H Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C., contains excellent papers on various aspects of self-improvement.

A mimeographed folder, No. 201C, describing correspondence courses of the USDA Graduate School contains a list of 13 references on administration, and related fields and 34 references on leadership, management and supervision. This is available from USDA branch libraries.

An excellent book on self-improvement is -- "The Technique on Getting Things Done," by Dr. Donald A. Laird and Eleanor C. Laird, can be purchased from the McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 330 West 42d Street, New York 36, N. Y. "The Technique of Handling People" by the same authors is a good book on human relations.

Two useful books on effective speaking and writing are: "The Art of Plain Talk," and "The Art of Readable Writing," by Dr. Rudolph Flesch, published by Harper and Brothers. "Word Power Made Easy - The Complete Three Week Vocabulary Builder," by Norman Lewis is also a very good book. The paper bound edition can be purchased for 35 cents a copy.

Since self-improvement depends so much on reading, employees are advised to investigate any reading improvement courses that may be available to them.

For home study information, write to the National Home Study Council, 1420 New York Avenue, Washington, D. C., for "The Home Study Blue Book and Directory of Accredited Private Home Study Schools and Courses."

"Developing Yourself" by Dick Carlson, Managing Consultant, Nationwide Insurance Companies, Columbus, Ohio.

Pastuer, Rogers, Slade and Hill, 551 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. -- paper presented at 14th Annual Conference of the American Society of Training Directors, May 6-8, 1958.

## Energy of Will

### A key to self-improvement

The French have a proverb which implies that it is the energy of individual men that confers a value upon the State and even upon the very soil they cultivate: "As are the men, so is the soil."

"The cultivation of the quality of energy of will is of the greatest importance. Resolute determination in pursuit of worthy hopes is the foundation of all true greatness of character. In a word, it is the man himself."

Do something that will merit attention, no matter how small. Begin somewhere, anywhere, and work, work, work. If you happen not to get on the right track, you soon will if you keep working. Your small reward will spur you to a larger reward; your work will begin to feed your ambition; you will develop your energy of will. This is real self-improvement.







